R842-09 ERIC REPORT RESUME

ED 010 225 1-31-67 24 (REV)

REFERENCE GROUP ORIENTATION AND TEACHER ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION.

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BR-5-0217-OP-11
OP-11
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EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.68 17P.

*SCHOOL DISTRICTS, *SCHOOL ORGANIZATION, *ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES, *TEACHER ATTITUDES, *GROUP STRUCTURE, COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS, QUESTIONNAIRES, LEGISLATION, EUGENE, OREGON

A STUDY WAS REPORTED OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL-COSMOPOLITAN ORIENTATION, A CONCEPT FROM REFERENCE GROUP THEORY, AND THE RESISTANCE TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE. A QUESTIONNAIRE WAS ADMINISTERED TO 329 PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS IN FIVE CONTIGUOUS SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA WHICH WERE TO LOSE THEIR INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE STATE@S 1961 LEGISLATIVE REORGANIZATION MANDATE. AT THE TIME NONE OF THE DISTRICTS HAD YET FORMULATED DEFINITE PLANS FOR REORGANIZATION. USABLE QUESTIONNAIRES WERE RETURNED BY 277 TEACHERS. THE FINDINGS INDICATED FACTORS OTHER THAN LOCAL OR COSMOPOLITAN ORIENTATION HAD INFLUENCED TEACHER ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION. TEACHERS OPPOSED TO REORGANIZATION WERE FOUND TO ACTUALLY KNOW LESS ABOUT THE FACTUAL DETAILS OF THE ISSUE THAN THOSE WHO SUPPORTED REORGANIZATION. IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT THE INFLUENCE OF REFERENCE GROUP ORIENTATION UPON PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION, BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL TO THE SCHOOL, BE STUDIED IN FUTURE RESEARCH. (RS)

Occasional Paper No. 11

Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
Eugene

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
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REFERENCE GROUP ORIENTATION

AND

TEACHER-ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION

by

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EUGENE, OREGON

A paper presented to the American
Educational Research Association, Division A, Administration,
for the annual meeting, February 19, 1966,
Pick-Congress Hotel, Chicago, Illinois.

This paper reports the findings of a field study[1] which can be conceptualized at a high abstractional level as attempting to investigate the relationship between local-cosmopolitan orientation, a concept from reference group theory, the independent variable, and the phenomenon of resistance to organizational change, the dependent variable. Specifically, the concept of local-cosmopolitan orientation is applied to 329 public school teachers in five contiguous school districts in Pennsylvania. All districts were faced with imminent mandatory reorganization.

Providing the rationale for the study were observations which have been made by various authorities on school district reorganization regarding the existence of an irrational and pervasive spirit of provincialism or localism which has appeared to affect the attitudes of residents of communities considering the prospect of school district reorganization.[2] This parochialistic phenomenon frequently has been credited by authorities as being primarily instrumental in causing residents of local school districts to reject proposals of reorganization, the most logically and factually well-founded arguments notwithstanding.

In light of such observations it was thought that the use of the concept of local-cosmopolitan orientation[3] from reference group theory might afford a means for understanding teacher-attitude toward school district reorganization. The assumption was held that locally oriented teachers would tend to perceive a state mandated reorganization directive as an outside threat to the immediate status quo to which they by definition are psycho-sociologically committed. It was conversely assumed that teachers oriented to a more cosmopolitan reference group would tend to perceive reorganization not particularly as a threat to the local status quo but more as a beneficial effect upon the wider periphery of state schools in general.

Therefore, it was hypothesized that teachers evidencing a local reference group orientation would prove to be more susceptible to the influence of provincialism and would consequently be more likely to react negatively to reorganization than would those teachers evidencing a cosmopolitan orientation.

Procedures

A review of available literature on local-cosmopolitan orientation indicated that thus far only one index has been developed which measures, independent of membership behavior, the existence of these reference groups. Sutthoff, in his study of local-cosmopolitan orientation of PTA members and their participation in school affairs,[4] developed a three-item Guttman scale which demonstrated the facility for discriminating local or cosmopolitan orientation. Sutthoff's index was adapted and employed in the present study.

Using criteria similar to those employed by Sutthoff, the adapted local-cosmopolitan index was found to be valid and, following computation of reproducibility and scalability, was found to be acceptably reliable. The index was determined to be valid for the purpose of this study by virtue of the fact that locals and cosmopolitans identified by the index conform to characteristic differences observed of locals and cosmopolitans in other studies. These differentiating variables consisted of residential mobility, organizational membership, and mass media behavior. Chi-square analyses of these variables revealed differences between locals and cosmopolitans in the predicted directions significant at or beyond the .01 level of confidence. Acceptable reliability for the adapted local-cosmopolitan index was indicated by the coefficients of reproducibility of .925, scalability (item) of .75, and scalability (individual) of .65.

Because a search of the literature revealed no previously developed attitude scale concerning school district reorganization, it was necessary to construct such a scale. The Likert method of attitude scale construction was utilized and a thirty-item scale was developed which proved to be valid, reliable, and unidimensional. The validity of the scale was attested to by a panel of sixteen authorities in the field of school district reorganization and also by the results

of a factor analysis indicating that 77 percent of the test variance was accounted for by Factor I, the remaining variance being evenly distributed between five other factors which were considered to be errors of measurement. Determination of the reliability of the attitude scale on school district reorganization was accomplished by the use of the split-half technique using a Pearson correlation of odd-even items and employing the required Spearman-Brown correctional formula. The resulting reliability coefficient was .97.

A questionnaire was compiled which included: (1) the adapted local-cosmopolitan index; (2) the Likert attitude scale on school district reorganization; (3) a twelve-item objective test of factual knowledge of the legal provisions of the specific school district reorganization mandate affecting the teachers of the study; and (4) various demographic and other informational items which were considered to be essential to the study. Included in these items requested of the teacher-respondents of the study were number of years of college training, number of degrees held, newspapers subscribed to, magazines subscribed to, number of organizational memberships, origin of last move, length of service in present school district, length of residence in present community, age, size of community where respondent was raised, years of teaching, and major source of information about the reorganization mandate.

The questionnaire was administered during the fall of 1962 to the 329 elementary and secondary public school teachers employed by five contiguous school districts located in central Pennsylvania. All five school districts were to lose their individual identities under the provisions of Pennsylvania's 1961 legislative reorganization mandate but at the time of the administration of the study none of these districts had yet formulated definite plans for reorganization. Usable questionnaires were returned by 277 teachers, 84 percent of the sample.

Findings

A chi-square analysis of the distributions (see Table I) and a t test of the difference between means (see Table II) of the reorganization attitude scale responses of the 51 teachers identified by the local-cosmopolitan index as locals and the 218 teachers identified as cosmopolitans indicated that no significant difference in attitude toward school district reorganization existed between the two groups.

TABLE I

COMPARISON OF REORGANIZATION ATTITUDE-SCALE SCORES

FOR LOCALS AND COSMOPOLITANS OF MAJOR STUDY

Orientation	Reorganization Attitude-Scale Scores			Total
	49 or less N	50 - 70 N	71 or More N	N
Locals	15	18	18	51
Cosmopolitans	77	62	79	218
Not Answered 8			Total	269

Chi-square = 1.074, $p < .60$, df = 2

TABLE II

COMPARISON OF REORGANIZATION ATTITUDE-SCALE RESULTS

FOR LOCALS AND COSMOPOLITANS OF MAJOR STUDY

	Locals	Cosmopolitans
Mean	61.627	58.798
Standard Deviation	19.975	21.544
Range of Scores	10-110	2 -113
Number of Respondents	51	218
Minimum Possible Score	0	0
Maximum Possible Score	120	120

t test of means = .89

An interesting finding was that, although locals and cosmopolitans demonstrated no significant difference in either amount of factual knowledge concerning the provisions of the reorganization mandate or attitude toward the reorganization issue, locals characteristically reported discussion or hearsay as their major sources of information concerning reorganization while cosmopolitans almost unanimously reported more sophisticated channels of communication such as journals, bulletins, newspapers, etc., as being their major sources of information. This finding, shown in Table III, was significant at the .001 level of confidence. In effect, this appears to indicate that the two-step flow[5] of communication is particularly operative for locals.

TABLE III

COMPARISON OF MAJOR SOURCES OF REORGANIZATION INFORMATION

FOR LOCALS AND COSMOPOLITANS OF MAJOR STUDY

Orientation	Major Sources of Reorganization Information: Discussion or Hearsay N	Newspapers, etc. N	Total N
Locals	26	18	44
Cosmopolitans	33	164	197
Not Answered 36		Total	241

Chi-square = 34.96, $p < .001$, df = 1

In spite of the finding that local and cosmopolitan orientation in this instance fails to provide a cogent means for predicting teacher-attitude toward school district reorganization, the following factors apparently did reflect some predisposing influence on teacher-attitude toward the issue, significant at or less than the .05 level of confidence: (1) significantly more elementary teachers recorded low (less favorable) scores on the attitude scale than did secondary teachers (Table IV); (2) significantly more teachers aged 41 or more recorded low

TABLE IV

COMPARISON OF REORGANIZATION ATTITUDE-SCALE SCORES

FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY TEACHERS OF MAJOR STUDY

Attitude-Scale Scores	Grade Level Taught: Elementary N	Secondary N	Total N
49 or Less	58	36	94
50 - 70	43	42	85
71 or More	36	62	98
Not Answered 0		Total	277

Chi-square = 11.42, $p < .01$, df = 2

(less favorable) scores on the attitude scale than did teachers aged 40 and under (Table V); (3) significantly more teachers having school district service

TABLE V

COMPARISON OF REORGANIZATION ATTITUDE-SCALE SCORES

TO AGE FOR TEACHERS OF MAJOR STUDY

Attitude-Scale Scores	Age of Respondents 20-30 N	31-40 N	41-50 N	51-60 N	Over 60 N	Total N
49 or Less	16	15	28	28	4	91
50 - 70	27	13	17	19	3	79
71 or More	43	21	20	11	2	97
Not Answered	10					Total 267

Chi-square = 22.862, $p < .01$, df = 8

of 10 or more years recorded low (less favorable) scores on the attitude scale than did those teachers having 9 or less years of service (Table VI);

TABLE VI

COMPARISON OF REORGANIZATION ATTITUDE-SCALE SCORES

TO YEARS OF SERVICE IN SCHOOL DISTRICT FOR TEACHERS OF MAJOR STUDY

Attitude-Scale Scores	Years of Service in School District 2 or Less N	3-9 N	10 or More N	Total N
49 or Less	18	20	46	84
50 - 70	28	23	24	75
71 or More	29	45	21	95
Not Answered	23			Total 254

Chi-square = 24.762, $p < .001$, df = 4

(4) significantly more teachers scoring at the mean or less on the test of factual knowledge concerning the reorganization mandate recorded low (less favorable) scores on the attitude scale than did those teachers scoring above the mean on the test of knowledge (Table VII). (Kuder-Richardson "Footrule" reliability for the test of knowledge was .73.)

TABLE VII

COMPARISON OF REORGANIZATION ATTITUDE-SCALE SCORES

TO FACTUAL-KNOWLEDGE TEST SCORES FOR TEACHERS OF MAJOR STUDY

Attitude-Scale Scores	Factual - Knowledge Test Scores 5 or Less N	6 or More N		Total N
49 or Less	39	53		92
50 - 70	42	38		80
71 or More	33	64		97
Not Answered 8			Total	269

Chi-square = 6.11, $p < .05$, df = 2

Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that the concepts of local and cosmopolitan orientation from reference group theory can be applied to public school teachers.[6] The adapted Sutthoff local-cosmopolitan index which was employed in this study demonstrated the facility for identifying locals and cosmopolitans who share the attributes of locals and cosmopolitans observed in other studies.

The finding that locals can and do exist within the confines of such a social structure as represented by the teachers of this study proved to be an illuminating discovery, for at the outset of the study, Gouldner's findings and other observations notwithstanding,[7] some doubt had been entertained that so provincial a creature could inhabit the ranks of a group so actively striving for professional

status. Almost 100 percent of the teachers involved in the study are members of the state and national teacher-organizations which have been most influential in the crusade for recognition of teaching as a profession.

However, the hypothesis that the use of such concepts as local or cosmopolitan orientation per se could assist in explaining and predicting teacher-attitude toward Pennsylvania's school district reorganization effort was not upheld. This finding appears to indicate that although locals and cosmopolitans do exist within the teacher-group represented in the study, such reference groups are, for some reason, inoperative in influencing the potential member's attitude toward reorganization. The ineffectiveness of the groups as reference groups owes ostensibly to the lack of majority or normative opinion held by either group. Both locals and cosmopolitans evidenced normal curve distributions in response to the attitude scale.

The results of this study do not necessarily imply that "provincialism" fails to be of influence in affecting teacher-attitude toward reorganization. The study's findings, rather, suggest that locals are no more likely to be affected by this influence than are cosmopolitans.[8]

There were indications that factors other than local or cosmopolitan orientation were influencing teacher-attitude toward school district reorganization. These predisposing factors, some of which appear to be possible correlates, were discovered to be: (1) grade level taught (elementary or secondary); (2) age; (3) length of service in school district; and (4) amount of knowledge of the factual provisions of the reorganization mandate. Thus, elementary school teachers, teachers aged 41 or more, teachers with 10 or more years service in a district, and teachers possessing an inferior amount of factual knowledge of the reorganization mandate evidence a negative perception of reorganization. In contrast,

secondary school teachers, teachers aged 40 or less, teachers with less than 10 years of service in a district, and teachers possessing a superior amount of factual knowledge concerning the reorganization mandate evidence a positive perception of reorganization.

It is possible that these predisposing factors actually constitute, within themselves, reference groups of a type, for it is a well documented observation that within the milieu of our segmented society there exists a proliferation of such member-influencing groups.[9]

While the concepts of local and cosmopolitan orientation failed in the present case as predictors of teacher-attitude toward school district reorganization, in another instance they might well prove, as they have in the past, to be the Rosetta stone in the deciphering of an otherwise perplexing situation. Thus, these very concepts might be especially useful as teachers increasingly see themselves as professionals.[10] The results of other studies[11] showing that professionals tend to be cosmopolitans rather than locals, and unsettled questions concerning relationships among such variables as reference group orientation, loyalty to the organization, and behavior toward clients, especially as these occur within educational organizations, open a floodgate of possibilities for further research.

Our final comments are more specific to the study reported here. Conflict in reference group commitments needs to be explored. For example, certain reference groups might be stronger than others in determining attitudes on a particular issue. It is possible that teachers define school district reorganization as a political rather than an educational issue, with the result that loyalties become blurred and commitments mixed.

A finding of poignant interest in this study was that teachers who were more opposed to reorganization also knew less about the factual details of the issue.

Is it possible that opposition to reorganization represents a unique type of perceptual defense or cognitive dissonance[12] which is relatively impervious to the ordinary channels cf organizational communication?

A last comment should be made in regard to the finding that the locals and cosmopolitans in our sample differ in their sources of information concerning reorganization; journals, bulletins, and newspapers being the major sources for cosmopolitans and discussion and hearsay the major sources for locals. This finding should alert the school administrator to systematic differences which should be taken into account as he provides information to groups within his organization and to the general public. In fact, the influence of reference group orientation on patterns of communication, both internal and external to the school, seems potentially a most fruitful area for further research.

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[1]Robert B. Brumbaugh, "A Test of the Effectiveness of Certain Concepts from Reference Group Theory in Predicting Teacher-Attitude toward School District Reorganization" (unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, College of Education, The Pennsylvania State University, 1963). Also see Brumbaugh, "Local-Cosmopolitan Orientation and Teacher Attitudes Toward Reorganization." Administrator's Notebook, XII (March, 1964).

[2]See, for example, National Commission on School District Reorganization, Your School District (Washington, D.C.: Department of Rural Education, NEA, 1948), p. 131; W. Monfort Barr et al., "School District Reorganization in Indiana," Bulletin of the School of Education, Indiana University, XXXV (1960); and Herbert E. Bryan, "A Study of Factors Affecting School District Reorganization in Pennsylvania" (unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1954).

[3]The concept of local-cosmopolitan orientation is fully discussed by its originator, Robert K. Merton, in his book, Social Theory and Social Structure (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), pp. 387-436.

[4]John Sutthoff, "Local-Cosmopolitan Orientation and Participation in School Affairs" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Education, Stanford University, 1960). Also see Sutthoff, "Local-Cosmopolitan Orientation and Participation in School Affairs," Administrator's Notebook, IX (November, 1960).

[5]Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (4th ed.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) and Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1955).

[6]The distinction between reference groups and membership groups should be underscored here. See Muzafer Sherif, "The Concept of Reference Groups in Human Relations," Group Relations at the Crossroads, ed. Muzafer Sherif and M. O. Wilson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), pp. 203-230.

[7]See, for example, Alvin W. Gouldner, "Cosmopolitans and Locals: Toward an Analysis of Latent Social Roles," Administrative Science Quarterly, I and II, (December, 1957; March, 1958), pp. 281-306 and 444-480, and Vernon J. Benz, A Study of Leadership in a Liberal Arts College (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1950).

[8]The extent to which the peculiarities of the school district reorganization problem in Pennsylvania influenced this outcome can only be speculated upon. However, the possibility that factors specific or unique to the Pennsylvania setting were operative should not be ruled out.

[9]Everett V. Stonequist, The Marginal Man (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961).

[10]For an analysis of the consequences of professionalization in educational organization, see D. J. Willower, "Professionalization and Education," Peabody Journal of Education, XXXVIII (September, 1960).

[11]For a review of this literature see Peter M. Blau and W. Richard Scott, Formal Organizations (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 60-74.

[12]Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson & Co., 1957). Also see a more refined conceptual treatment of a possible correlate to this phenomenon in Milton Rokeach, The Open and Closed Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1960).